
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES 12/29/08

The Board of Selectmen met in the Town Hall, Joseph F. Bilotta Meeting Room as scheduled with Thomas Alonzo, Dave Matthews present, Thomas Mason arrived at 7:20 and CAFO Kerry Speidel present. Paula Bertram and Steven M. deBettencourt absent. Meeting opened at 7:04 P.M. with the Pledge of Allegiance

PUBLIC DISCUSSION

Chair informed the public that as last week's meeting was not televised, opportunity to give people at home an update on the storm status and an opportunity for the public to come forward to share their concerns. Read the attached advisory notice from Unitil.

Concern is that many people have voiced concern about receiving a larger bill than normal even with a two-week outage. Also with regard to service from Verizon and Comcast directed public to contact the company's service lines. Has been reported that Verizon is working with their customers to adjust their cell phones due to extended amount of use. If you still are not getting satisfactory response from these companies you may contact the CAFO's office but ask for the public to contact the DPU and register their complaints and to keep detailed records of all expenses that were incurred.

Special thank you to Fire Chief Scott Glenny, who's headed up the emergency management team with the Chief of Police and Department of Public Works Director and everybody that was involved in the effort. Part of the process post ice storm is to review the procedures to determine what worked well and what didn't work well. Know we will be addressing communication.

CAFO provided the following information to the board:

- Eagle House Senior Center remains closed through this week as we've experienced excessive water issues. Sump pumps as well as sprinkler issues. Have service crews on site, electric service has been restored however no telephones at this time.
- Are able to provide the Meals on Wheels program with pre-packaged meals and are being delivered to seniors.
- Coordinating transportation with the MART service, conducted by Sue Doherty and Faith Anderson are coordinating these efforts from their homes.
- Tomorrow there will be five sub-contracted crews removing and/or chipping debris. Much progress was made in H Hills and the Whalom area as well. Beal and Skylark were 100% complete, DPW crew concentrated on the sidewalks on Lancaster Ave., Leominster Rd, and Whalom Rd to insure we can clear them of snow for the safety of the pedestrians through the winter. They began to chip debris around the public buildings and will continue to do so as well as the upper and lower common. DPW will also hit random properties. For the remainder of the week forces will get to the Pine St, Arbor St, Page St, Flathill Rd, Elmwood Rd loop. Smaller equipment will work on Lancaster Ave from Town Ctr to Page St. Encourage people to use the landfill facility, hire a contractor (with insurance) and/or burn. There can be no definitive time line given the time of year; this could go into spring if the material is buried in the snow banks. One of the subs will be in the North Cemetery tomorrow.

Chair announced that we are in discussions with town counsel to review what our options are in getting other services. Will explore establishing our own power and light company, Townsend has already established a committee to investigate that possibility. Working with legislature on when and where the hearings on Unitil will be and will keep the public informed as to the location. Urge people to register their complaints with the Department of Public Utilities and can be obtained at www.state.ma.us/dpu, will also have available in the office. There is also a petition that has been circulating throughout town and will afford people the opportunity to voice what they've been through for the past two weeks.

Open to public discussion:

Steve Kahn, 52 Rangeley Road questioned whether the board will be posting all matters with concern to Unitil on the website and questioned whether there is anything we can do as a group with the other communities. Have heard that Unitil has only 7 to 10 crews to take care of over ¼ million people is crazy. Within two days once the crews from out of State and National Grid were recruited, the town was wired. What can we do in general all Unitil sends you is a statement on estimated bills.

Chair the worst thing that can happen is that life goes on as usual and the anger and frustration that was felt quickly goes away, focus in a way that lets people know we want pro-active measures taken to ensure that this doesn't happen again.

Town had contacted the State on Monday after the storm as we were continually given false information from Unitil, took some time to get engaged and by Thursday of that week, the State officials were irate as they were hearing what we had from Unitil and the constant miscommunication. We need to make sure that they continually hear us and the push is for the hearings to be held locally.

Leonard Vilandry, 4 Lincoln Street reviewed the estimated Unitil bill he received on November's invoice a statement was made that as of December 1st the rates will be increased and effectively the rate was changed to 11788, which was supposedly reviewed by the DPU. Send notice to Attorney General, to the DPU, they don't deserve one fraction of a cent and we need to fight to get Unitil out of the Town of Lunenburg as quickly as possible.

Chair informed the board that George Gantz (Unitil), stated that the cost of the entire effort and everything that happened could get transferred on to the property owners.

Donna Patacchiola, 132 Hemlock Drive spent time as hotel and was informed by Unitil crews that were there that Lunenburg has poor infrastructure and if it hadn't been for National Grid, we wouldn't have received our power until February. She was told by a Unitil employee that we cannot go to any other company because they own our territory. Want to thank the efforts of everyone at the Turkey Hill Middle School.

Chair recognized Sue Glenny, Sue Deming and Gerry Sampson as well as volunteers and fire/police personnel that staffed the emergency shelter.

Pete Wheeler, 3 Chase Road received an actual bill that was doubled what it was in November. He called Unitil three times and went to touch tone beeping, cut off every single time. To a point where he's not paying this bill.

Chair recommended that each individual document the forms of service they receive from Unitil, get in touch with the grass roots people who are organizing this. Document who you spoke to and what time, date etc., and the answers that you receive. Town will be reaching out to the other towns; but noted that this will not occur overnight, this is a long process and we need to stay focused on this. Prime state department to contact is the DPU, the Attorney General, State Representatives, Senator, and Governor's office.

Steve Kahn, we need to work in conjunction with the other communities and want to get other people who want to be involved. We have to have united action.

Susan 717 Reservoir Road, suggested everyone boycott and not pay our bills,

Don Whittier, 519 Burrage Street, expressed appreciation to National Grid. Noted that he does not have power some time in the summer time. It has been over 6 years since trees he's seen any trees being trimmed over the wires by Unitil. Much of the damage was caused by trees being over the wires, questioned if there's any venue to have them trim trees, should be part of their maintenance.

Chair agreed 100% that much of this damage occurred because of improper maintenance of their lines, hope to find out who is responsible and what can be done

Ed Howard 340 West Street, relationship between the town and Unitil and read excerpts of the contract, which is available on the DPE website, the company "will use reasonable efforts" ... they are exempt if they are unable and think that it can be proven that they weren't unable as once National Grid was brought in the power was restored. Company shall be liable only when the company has acted in a grossly negligent manner. The language that deals with their responsibility and that they shall use reasonable efforts and this is the basis that the town could make an argument with the DPU. Before the town decides, they want to be a public utility, need to consider the costs that a storm of this magnitude could incur, numerous problems that need to be addressed. Have never seen anyone in the 17 years that he's lived here cutting trees, they've been grossly negligent in not cutting trees.

Chair want to be clear to the people and make sure that they are aware this contract is with Unitil and the DPU.

Tom Doucette of 42 Fairview Road, questioned if the board has seen the weather reports and wants to know what happens with another major storm, are we going to be going through this again. What have we done since everyone has received their power back? Extended appreciation to the Department of Public Works, the Fire Department, and the volunteers at the shelter.

Chair reiterated that this is going to be a very long process, to make changes may require legislation that has to be passed through the state. They remain in place until we know what the process is.

Bill Stevens, 61 Gilchrist Street, storm of 1996 out of power for 5 days, same problems with Unitil, there was an investigation, FG&E was slapped on the wrist and said they would get better. A number of years have gone by and here we are again, need to be cautious as we move forward, to keep the pressure on them. Can't let them get away with it again this time.

Kim Howard 340 West Street, major inconvenience for many people have to remember in dealing with Unitil is the people in Fitchburg and the people that they had to deal with, they suffered tragically, many didn't have generators, families were forced to live in shelters for two weeks. Hope everyone keeps in mind the poorest of citizens who suffered throughout this whole thing.

Andy St.Onge, 82 New West Townsend Road, questioned why we can't do a class action suit, and who is heading the grass roots effort. Is there a way to pose a question on the town's website?

Petition was initiated by Cathy Clark of 275 Cross Road out of frustration and to give a voice to people to tell our state government , in large part they're not giving enough attention to the people, purpose being to send to Governor's office, the state reps and our local government officials. DPU needs to be stronger, this is a health and safety issue, too many people that were really hurt by this. There is also a petition on line, www.gopetition.com/online/24194.html that is being posted around town. Have terrific group in town that did a terrific job, neighbors should also be recognized for their efforts. Need to work on communication such as where you can find generators etc.

Board will keep public posted as they develop, hearings with DPU and every step along the way. Keep this drive going, demanding well into next year, asking what is going on with this. Looking to best serve the residents of the town.

Jackie Ramondelli, 599 Reservoir Road regarding this meeting the town's scroll (community bulletin board) should have stated what this meeting was about. Noted that she has always had a power issue at her property.

Gloria O'Brien 222 Hollis Road, questioned if there is an emergency management plan that is mandated of utility companies.

Respectfully,

Being no further business board voted unanimously to adjourn Regular Session at 8:16 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Williams, Chief Administrative Assistant, Board of Selectmen